



## Lighten Up—Love and Laughter

### Lesson Plan

#### Objectives:

1. Participants will learn free and low cost things they can do to have fun with a partner.
2. Participants will learn that nurturing their couple relationship by having fun together affects their children.
3. Participants will create goals and a plan for having Together Nights with their partner.
4. Participants will talk together about having fun in relationships.
5. Participants will explore activities in the community that they can do with a partner.
6. Participants will learn about the importance of making a commitment to spending more time together.

#### Materials:

- DVD — *The Cosby Show*, Season 1, Disc 1, Episode 4, “Knight to Night” (00:38-5:35)
- DVD player and television or a computer with a DVD drive and a projector
- Participant binder pockets with handouts:
  - Fun and Free or Low Cost Things to Do worksheet
  - 10 Fun and Free or Low Cost Things You Can Do With Your Partner handout
  - Resource list of “Things to do in (your city/area)” (See Preparation note #1)
  - Our Plan for Together Night worksheet
  - How Well Do You Know Your Partner? handout
  - Brochures describing events in your area (You can get these from your local Chamber of Commerce; 4 or 5 different brochures are sufficient)
- Flip chart, dry erase board, etc.
- SPEAK/HEAR skills cards
- Two letter sized envelopes per couple
- Blank white paper for together night ideas activity (one sheet per couple)
- Pens
- Name tags
- Attendance sheet
- Materials for participant tables:
  - Play dough
  - Pipe cleaners
  - Paper and markers, etc.
- Participant incentives

### Session Overview:

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<b>Welcome and introductions</b>	(10-15 minutes)
<b>Video clip and discussion</b>	(10 minutes)
<b>Talking about it: Thinking about time spent together</b>	(10 minutes)
<b>Activity and Discussion: Importance of having fun together</b>	(8 minutes)
<b>Discussion: What do you do for fun?</b>	(5-7 minutes)
<b>Optional Activity (if time): How much does it cost?</b>	(5-7 minute)
<b>Discussion: Activities in the community</b>	(7 minutes)
<b>Discussion and planning: Together Night</b>	(25 minutes)
<b>Activity and discussion: How Well Do You Know Each Other?</b>	(20 minutes)
<b>Introduce take home activity</b>	(1 minutes)
<b>Wrap Up</b>	(10 minutes)

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<i>Session total</i>	<i>(2 hours)</i>
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#### Preparation:

1. Prepare ahead of time a list of fun and free or low cost things to do in your area. Many can be found on your city's official website or at the local Chamber of Commerce. These may include things like festivals, nearby parks and trails, historical sites, etc. Also include several brochures describing events or activities in your area.
2. You may want to write out the questions for the partner/group discussion time under #3 prior to the session.
3. As you prepare, think about personal stories that you can share with participants throughout the lesson.

**Procedure:****1. Welcome participants to the session (10-15 minutes).**

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- Introduce yourself to the group and the title of today’s lesson, “Lighten Up—Love and Laughter.”
- Welcome everyone to the session and, especially if you have new participants, have participants briefly introduce themselves.
- Ask about take home activities from the previous session (if applicable).

**2. Watch video clip and discuss (10 minutes).**

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- Note that this episode shows them taking time for themselves to just have fun together, away from their other responsibilities.
- Show a clip from *The Cosby Show* episode titled, “Knight to Night,” Season 1, Disc 1, Episode 4, (00:38-5:35).

**Ask:** “Do you think they were feeling stressed?” “Do you get stressed out sometimes?” “Do you think all parents get stressed out?” “How did they handle their stress in the video clip?” “What did you think about the way they handled their stress?” “How well did they use their speaking and listening skills?”

**Say:** “We all have different ways of handling stress. Some people:

- *Get angry*
- *Become violent*
- *Yell at their children*
- *Leave home*

*Spending time doing things together is important for creating and nurturing strong couple and family relationships. Having a healthy couple relationship or a good relationship with a close friend can help lessen the stress you may face in your current or future relationships and the stress you feel as a parent.”*

**3. Talking about it: Thinking about time spent together (10 minutes).**

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- Ask participants to talk with their partner or another participant about the questions below using the SPEAK/HEAR skills.

- Give participants SPEAK/HEAR skills cards to use during the dialogue. Some participants may be familiar with these skills from attending a previous session. However, the skills may be new to some participants.
- Briefly read through the skills listed on the SPEAK/HEAR skills card, and then allow participants time to talk with partners.

**Say:** *“After we become parents, life can get very busy and it is not always easy to find time to have fun. Take a few minutes to talk with one or two others about the time you spend with your partner or with friends or other loved ones. As you talk with your partner, use the discussion skills listed on the SPEAK/HEAR skills card.”*

- Display the following questions for participants:
  - “How do you feel about the amount of free time you have now that you have children?”*
  - “How do you feel about the amount of time you and your partner spend together, just the two of you?”*

#### **4. Activity and Discussion: The importance of having fun together (8 minutes).**

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**Ask:** *“Why is it important for couples to take time out to just be together and for single parents to take time out for themselves?”*

- Identify one end of the room as Agree and the other as Disagree. Have participants move back and forth in response to each of the following statements, then ask several participants why they feel that way.
- After participants share, go through the information below each statement.

**1. Couples who spend time together doing things they both enjoy are more satisfied and happy with their relationships.**

*“Some researchers have spent a lot of time looking into behaviors that can strengthen and improve relationships. They have found that couples who spend time together doing things they both enjoy are more satisfied and happy with their relationships than those who spend more time in separate activities. Having fun together gives couples time to relax, to be themselves, and to focus on being together.”*

**2. Happy, healthy relationships have more positive than negative interactions.**

*“When you have fun together, whether you go out to a movie or stay home and watch television, you create positive interactions with your partner, which are important for long-lasting, happy relationships.”*

*Research shows that people in healthy relationships have more positive than negative interactions with their partners. Positive interactions include laughing together, talking about your day, or even just a friendly smile or ‘hello’ when your partner enters the room.”*

**3. When you find time to spend with just your partner, it’s ok to talk about conflicts you are having with each other.**

*“Set aside time to be together and enjoy each other when you are not dealing with conflicts in your relationship. Have time with your partner when you can both relax, forget about any stresses in your lives, and just be together. You can’t have a great relationship if you focus on problems all of the time and you don’t take time for those positive interactions with your partner.”*

**4. Single parents need time with other adults who can listen and provide support.**

*“Single parents need a strong support network so they can relax, too. Talking on the phone or spending time with friends can help ease the stress that some single parents feel. Sometimes time alone is helpful, too.”*

**Ask:** *“How can the relationship you have with a partner influence your children?” “How can having relationships with friends influence the way you treat your children?”*

**Say:** *“If you model a healthy, happy relationship for your child, then your child is more likely to develop a positive attitude about relationships and is more likely to have stable relationships in the future.*

*Having positive relationships with friends and other adults helps some single parents be more patient with their children. ”*

**5. Discussion: What do you do for fun? (5-7 minutes).**

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- Have participants complete the “Fun and Free or Low Cost Things to Do” worksheet during the discussion.

- Write participants' comments on a flip chart or dry erase board.

**Ask:** *“What kinds of fun activities do you and your partner or children do together?” “Do you try to do things you both enjoy? How do you decide?” “How often should couples do fun things together?” “How often should single parents find time to spend with other adults?” “What are some things that can prevent you from doing things you enjoy?”*

Sample responses (for the last question):

- Money
- Having time
- Agreeing on activities
- Child care

**Say:** *“After you have kids, having fun with your partner or friends may not seem as important. Life can get very busy, but that is why it’s important to make time for fun in your life. Having fun can be a release and help us relax and stop thinking about all of the pressures and stresses of life. It’s important to do fun activities with your children, but it is also important to have some grown-up time away from your kids every now and then. For couples, this relaxed and playful time is important for strengthening the bond between you and your partner, and having fun with other adults provides an important support function for single parents as well.”*

## 6. Optional Activity (if time): ‘How much does it cost?’ (5-7 minutes).

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- Assign one side of the room as “free” and the other side as “very expensive” and have participants stand at the end of the room (or anywhere in the middle) that represents how much money their favorite activity costs.
- If a favorite activity is to watch TV shows at home together, then that participant would stand at the end of the room labeled “free.” However, if a favorite activity is to go out to the movies, then that participant might stand somewhere closer to the middle of the room.
- After participants have moved to the appropriate area of the room, have each person explain the activity.

**Say:** *“We all have different things that we like to do. Some cost money, some are free. Now let’s take some time to talk a little more about free and low cost activities you can do around the area – either as a couple or with friends or your children.”*

## 7. Activities in the community (7 minutes).

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- Refer to the resources in the participant folders that list fun things to do in your area, as well as the state of Missouri. There are two handouts: one specific to your region (which you will create; See Preparation notes, #1), and the other is a more general list provided by this program. Go through the list, highlighting what is free and what is low cost.

**(Note:** Also tell participants where they can go to learn more about events in the area. For example, is there a phone number they can call, a website they can visit, or a section of the newspaper that provides information about upcoming events and activities?)

## 8. Explain “Together night” (5 minutes).

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**🗨️ Say:** *“Now we are going to talk about setting aside time for ‘together nights.’ This discussion will focus a lot on couples, so some of you may not feel like it applies to you. However, someday you may be in another relationship, so we hope the information will still be useful to you. You could also use some of the ideas to plan activities with your children.*

*One way to make sure that partners have time together is to schedule a ‘together night.’ It may be once a week or once a month, but should be something that is consistent and for just the two of you. Here are some things to remember when planning a ‘together night.’*

- *Both of you should come up with ideas for ‘together night.’*
- *Be sure you can agree on each activity that you select.*
- *Activities can range from watching a movie at home, to going for a walk, to going out to dinner together.*
- *Alternate who is in charge of the activities for ‘together night’ (one week you will choose the activity while the next week your partner will choose).”*

## 9. “Together night” planning (15 minutes).

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**Note:** Choose between Option A and Option B below.

Option A:

- Distribute one sheet of blank white paper to each couple, or single participant, and 2 envelopes.

- Have participants fold the sheet in half four times so that there are 16 boxes when it is unfolded.
- Ask participants to work with their partner (if their partner is present) to fill in each square on the page with an activity that they can do with their partner. Have participants think of activities they can do at home (when their children are not around or are in bed for the night) as well as things they can do outside of the home.
- Remind couples to have both partners share ideas and choose activities.

**Say:** *“Think about some things you could do on your ‘together night.’ Remember, these activities can be very simple, such as watching a movie or a favorite television show, doing chores together, going for a walk, or going out to eat. This activity is also a good way for parents and older children to come up with fun things to do. You could fill a jar with ideas and draw a slip of paper out when you are looking for something fun to do together.”*

- Have participants label their two envelopes with “Activities to do at Home” and “Activities to do Away from Home.”
- After participants have come up with 16 activities, have them tear the page on the folded lines, fold each slip of paper in half, and place it in the appropriate envelope.

Option B (works better when all participants have a partner):

- Refer participants to the “Our Together Night Plan” worksheet in their packets.
- Explain the worksheet and have participants fill in their responses.

**Say:** *“After you come up with some activities that you both agree on, then take some time to talk about:*

- *how you will plan activities*
- *how often you will have ‘together nights,’ and*
- *who will be first to plan the activities*

*Plan to have your ‘together night’ once a week, or once a month, whatever works best for your family. The important thing is that it is consistent and you make time to be with your partner. You can still be flexible with ‘together nights’ if something unexpected comes up, as long as you stay in the habit of making time to be together.”*

## 10. Discuss “Together night” planning (5 minutes).

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- Talk with participants about the plan they created.

**Ask:** *“Did you come up with a plan for your ‘together nights’ that you think will work? Why or why not?” “Have any of you tried planning activities this way before?”*

## 11. Activity: How well do you know each other? (15 minutes).

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- If you have couples, have them work together to ask each other the questions on the “How Well Do You Know Each Other?” handout. If you have singles, have them work with a partner to share answers to the questions on the handout, only sharing what they feel comfortable sharing.

**Say:** *“The more you know about your partner, and how he or she feels and thinks, the closer your relationship will be. Spending one-on-one time with your partner is one way you can learn more about your partner.”*

*In your packets, you will find a ‘How Well Do You Know Each Other?’ worksheet that lists 25 getting to know you questions. Take about 10-15 minutes to work with your partner to answer each question, or as many as you can get through. You don’t need to write anything down, just try to answer the questions about your partner. Have one partner ask the questions first, while the other answers, then switch. If you don’t know the answer to a question, ask your partner for the answer! Maybe you will learn something new.*

*If you don’t have a partner or if your partner is not here today, then pair up with another person and ask each other the questions on the handout. You do not have to share anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.*

*If your partner is not here today, share this handout with him or her and see how many questions you can answer about each other.”*

- Have participants work together for about 15 minutes to answer the questions.

## 12. Discuss “How well do you know each other?” activity (5 minutes).

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**Ask:** *“What are some things you learned about your partners?” “Were there any surprises?” “Did anyone get all of the answers right?”*

**13. Introduce take home activity** (1 minute).

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**Say:** *“Have a ‘together night’ with your partner. Report back at the next session and let us know what you did and how you came to that decision.”*

**14. Wrap up the session and give out incentives** (10 minutes).

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- Ask if anyone has any general questions.
- Tell participants that they can visit <http://ncfamilies.com/jitp/> for community resources.
- Thank participants for coming and participating in the lesson.
- Make sure everyone knows the day and location of the next session.

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